



JENNIFER M. GRANHOLM
GOVERNOR

STATE OF MICHIGAN
FAMILY INDEPENDENCE AGENCY
LANSING



NANNETTE M. BOWLER
DIRECTOR

February 28, 2003

Jeffrey Hadden
Letters to the Editor
Detroit News
615 W. Lafayette
Detroit, MI 48226

Dear Mr. Hadden:

I feel I must respond to the February 21, 2003 Detroit News Editorial on the Oakland County FIA and the Prosecutor's office there. It is true that in the past there have been differences of opinion and perhaps even miscommunication between these two partners in child protection. However, efforts were underway to attempt to resolve those differences at the local level even before I became the FIA director.

Children's Protective Services investigations have been my top priority since I came to FIA. Because I believe strongly that we can always improve the way we do business, I had already set in motion the establishment of a multi-disciplinary work group to address these issues. During our meeting, I asked the Oakland Prosecutor to partner with us in our efforts. The work group was not formed because Oakland County or any other county FIA office failed to do a good job, despite the difficult odds they face. It was formed to identify areas where both FIA and its partners can agree changes in the system are warranted, and to determine how those changes can be implemented to benefit all the children and families we serve.

In your editorial you state "changes to federal Law in 1997 shifted the primary mandate of the FIA from reunifying families to protecting children. Apparently, this came as news to many agency workers, who were unaware of their role as support for the prosecutor in filing petitions of neglect." I feel I need to clarify some inaccuracies.

First the 1997 Adoptions and Safe Families Act did not state that the role of the agency worker is to support the prosecutor in filing the neglect petition. Second, the federal law did not unilaterally change the primary mandate from reunifying families to protecting children. The federal law clarified under what circumstance reunification is appropriate, and in what instances reunification will not occur. Third, the federal law also clarified that safety of the child is the primary consideration in abuse and neglect petitions, of which our workers are fully aware.

It is important to recognize the significant and important role all the partners play in child protection. It is also important to understand that each partner takes that role seriously and does their best to serve the children. I believe all of us are committed to this and that we are moving together to build a stronger child protection system for this state and its families.

Sincerely,

Nannette M. Bowler
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